

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Vienna, Austria)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS OF PRESIDENT CARTER
UPON SIGNING SALT II TREATY

The most powerful currents of history have often been the ones that swept nations to war.

Yet as we look back on the causes of so many wars, we can see times when a more watchful course, even a small careful shift, might have guided nations that much better, that much further in the ways of peace.

That is the purpose of what we have done here in Vienna.

Today, the threat of nuclear holocaust still hangs over us, as it has for more than thirty years. Our two nations are now armed with thousands of nuclear weapons, each capable of causing devastation beyond measure and beyond imagination. Several other nations now have nuclear arms, and even more have the ability to develop the same destructive power. Weapons technology has continued to advance, and so have the dangers and the obvious need to control and to regulate this arms competition.

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, which have gone on for nearly ten years without interruption, represent the realization that a nuclear arms competition without shared rules, without verifiable limits, and without continuing dialogue is an invitation to disaster. Such an unrestrained competition would tempt the fate and the future, and would insult our intelligence and threaten the existence of humanity.

This prospect is a challenge to our courage and our creativity. If we cannot control our power to destroy, we can neither guide our fate nor preserve our future.

Like SALT I, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and the Limited Test Ban Treaty before it, this SALT II Treaty is based on the real security needs of our two nations. It will not end the continuing need for military strength and readiness on both sides. But SALT II does place important new limits on both the number and quality of nuclear arms. And it allows us to continue on course towards a safer world with even more substantial limitations and reductions in SALT III. We cannot interrupt or endanger this process.

I am entrusted with the security of the United States of America. I would never take any action that would jeopardize that sacred trust. Mr. President, we both have children and we want them to live, and to live in peace. We both have worked hard to give our own and our nations' children that security.

We realize that no one treaty, no one meeting can guarantee the safe future of our nations. In the end, peace can be won only if we have pursued it and struggled tenaciously to keep the peace all along. Yet this fight for peace has often seemed the most difficult victory to win.

Here today, as we set careful limits on our power, we draw boundaries around our fears of one another. As we begin to control our fears, we can better insure our future.

We can now continue to explore the planets. We can discover the essence of matter. We can find the power to preserve ourselves and our earth.

MORE

Each of us has only one nation. We both share the same world.

Not one nation on this earth, not one people, not one human being is harmed, threatened or deprived by this victory in the battle for peace. A victory is here for all.

In our lifetime, we have learned to make war by unlocking the atom -- the power of creation itself. To make peace we must limit our use of that power by sharing our courage, wisdom and faith.

These fundamental strengths of human kind have brought us to this table today.

In setting our hands to this treaty, we set our nations on a safer course.

We have labored long to make SALT II a safe and useful chart toward the future.

Let us pledge to use this treaty as we continue our passage to peace.

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